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AUTHOR Piper, David Warren
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ABSTRACT

This book offers a descriptive account of the world of the British external examiner: who they are, what they do, how they are appointed, and what problems they face. Findings are based on a questionnaire survey of and personal interviews with examiners. The external examiner is independent of the university awarding the degree and quite uninvolved with any of the candidates as he or she has never taught them. Examiners are not professionally trained in examination; they learn by experience. The examiner is considered the watchdog of quality, the symbol of integrity, and the embodiment of impartiality. Until recently, their appointment has been automatic and unquestioned; their value has been taken as self-evident. It is suggested that the convention of appointing external examiners is an example of a profession policing its own standards. To determine the validity of this statement, the status of academics as a profession is examined, and the work of the external examiner is reviewed to see if it amounts to policing standards of conduct. Despite flaws and sector and subject differences, it is recommended that the external examining system should not be dismissed as having little value. It is seen as a vigorous system involving a high proportion of the country's leading academics, whose work is undertaken with great seriousness and care. It is also a necessary function if there is to be a policy of parity between awards. (Contains references.) (NAV)

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